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10 August 2000 - The Straits Times

## Osama gave funds to Abu Sayyaf: Manila

MANILA -- Philippine Defence Secretary Orlando Mercado said international terrorist Osama bin Laden has provided funds to Muslim extremists holding more than a dozen hostages in the southern Philippines.

Mr Mercado said he could not detail military information on the link between Osama and the Abu Sayyaf group, but remarked that "'in recent years, they had been receiving funds'".

He added that the Abu Sayyaf had been "'boasting" of their connection with Bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi dissident living in Afghanistan and wanted by the United States for masterminding a terrorist attack on two US embassies in east Africa in 1998 which killed 224 people.

Mr Mercado was reacting to a report by the Philippine Daily Inquirer newspaper yesterday, quoting a former member of the Abu Sayyaf group as saying that Bin Laden and his brother-in-law Mohammad Jamal Khalifa had set up the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) in 1992 only to serve as a front for funding extremist groups.

The Abu Sayyaf member, identified only as Abu Anzar, said the IIRO worked under the Muslim World League, an organisation supported by the Saudi Arabia government.

Anzar said the relief organisation, in the guise of giving charity to local Muslim communities, provided funds to the Abu Sayyaf for acquiring arms.

Meanwhile, Muslim separatist guerillas raided a village in the southern Philippines and briefly held several Christian villagers as human shields against government troops, a military spokesman said yesterday.

Major Julieta Ando said about 50 members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front stormed the village of Takol in Davao del Sur province on Tuesday, ransacking homes for food and rations.

When government troops arrived later, the rebels hastily fled but seized an undetermined number of villagers to be used as human shields, Major Ando said.

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